From Loincloth, Suits, to Battle Greens

Politics of Clothing the 'Naked' Nagas

_____DOLLY KIKON[1]

INTRODUCTION

There is an old photograph of four Naga national leaders outside a detention centre in England in the 1960s.[2] The four are dressed alike, wearing modest suits and staring awkwardly at the photographer. The accompanying text is a report about how the four Naga tribesmen, with insufficient travel documents, were finally allowed to stay on in London as citizens of the Commonwealth. The four were visiting England to present their case for independence from postcolonial India to the British people. The photograph was published after a time when colonial anthropologists had traversed the course of the Naga Hills in order to study their mores, food habits, fabrics, and so on. The four Naga political leaders in the photograph were, therefore, an odd and unnerving reminder of the colonial encounter between the Nagas and the Occident, between Christianity and animism, and among notions of freedom, justice, and visions of the world. While postcolonial Indian intellectuals and policy makers knew and had studied Christoph von-Fürer-Haimendorf's *Naked Nagas*, once clothed in suits and demanding to enter England to renegotiate terms of engagement between the Nagas and the world, the men in the photograph seemed to be an embarrassing reminder to twentieth-century colonial authority and to postcolonial India, about just how much had gone wrong with the

[2] This photograph appeared in the 12 September 1962 edition of *The Times*.

remapping and reclassified imperial historical and political geography of South/Southeast Asia.

Given the complexities arising out of these political and historical processes, I am motivated by several questions: How does colonial ethnography and visual representation shape the understanding of the *Other* in postcolonial India? Is there a collective postcolonial national imagination that corresponds to these colonial constructs? Finally, how do communities such as the Naga, find their own basis for social and political representation under these representational regimes within the postcolonial nation?

Two frontiers in colonial India significantly shaped the political, historical, and legal histories of several communities inhabiting these regions. The North West Frontier Province and the North Eastern Frontier Province demarcated geographical spaces, constructed identities, and eventually witnessed the break-up of British colonialism and the rise of new modern states, such as India, Pakistan, and Burma. Referring to colonial institutions which transformed the colonized worlds, Benedict Anderson describes how institutions such as the census, map-making, and museums shaped the imagination of the colonial state, its subjects and colonial geography (Anderson 1991: 163). McClintock explains that these technologies of knowledge, such as maps, operated as technologies of possession. As a result, while colonialists mapped out areas and identified groups, cultures, and territories, the unexplored regions usually depicted as 'blank spaces' were inhabited by cannibals and monsters in the colonial imagination (McClintock 1995: 27–8).

The incorporation of 'blank spaces' and frontiers into postcolonial nations goes beyond the issue of purely geographical sovereignty. For Gupta, 'sovereignty does not solely depend on protecting spatial borders but on its ability to control the flow of commodities, cultures and ideas' (Gupta 1997: 190). Mitchell takes the concept of idea further when he highlights that the term 'idea' comes from the Greek verb 'to see', which is associated with the concept of mental imagery (Mitchell 1987: 5). Thus, ideas, like commodities and culture, are not only controlled and protected, they form an integral part of producing or reproducing a national imagination.

However, with respect to the idea of geographical spaces, Malkki argues that territoriality is not only a visual device and a concept on a map, but is felt to be synonymous with people's natural identity with their homeland. For Malkki, the connection between people and their

national territory is experienced as generally thought to be metaphysical (Malkki 1992: 26–7). Thus, the imagination of the colonized subjects and regions were informed by the colonialists' influence and association with a system of structures and representations about societies (in the West), which were external to the colonies. Therefore, the nineteenth-century explorer's imagination was a bewildering colonized geography extending from Africa to the north-eastern frontiers of India and beyond. The construction of the *Others* who inhabited such geographies was primarily a racial construction, which not only led to the establishment of disciplines such as anthropology, but eventually became a mechanism for assessing civilization, decency, and culture among other things.

Colonialists frequently referred to the colonized as 'savages' or 'primitives'. Colonial representations and images of 'savages' regularized a system of knowledge and practices in accordance with what Bourdieu would term as the colonial *habitus*. These were durable as an objective collective history of groups and transposable even in the postcolonial nations.[3] As Said argues, *Orientalism* could not represent itself and had to rely on the West and its authoritative domination of power and hegemony over the histories of its colonies; similarly, formerly colonized people can also end up applying the same colonial structures of defining and regulating its own people (Said 1979: 24).

The process of postcolonial citizenship for groups like the Nagas, categorized as perennial troublemakers inhabiting the nation's borderlands or 'anomalous danger zones' (Malkki 1992: 25), resembles Victor Turner's concept of initiation rites and the transition from a liminal stage to a distinct recognized member of society. Power therefore is defined and regulated through a process, or a series of initiation rites which Turner calls the rites of passage where individuals or groups undergo a transition from an ambiguous state to a stage of maturity and social status where he/she is obliged to follow societal rules and regulations (Turner 1967: 93–5). Thus, the rite of passage involves a *transition* from an ambiguous and unclassified world to a phase where

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[3] As Bourdieu argues, what appears 'regular' can be attributed to a group's structure and the habitus they inhabit; habitus, for Bourdieu, is a collection of 'durable, transposable' structures which function as 'systems of generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends' (Bourdieu 1977: 72–94).

the ambiguous is recognized, defined, and bestowed a status. However, this rite of passage of decolonization does not *transform* the centres of power: peripheral regions and groups in the former colony remain outside the domain of political power and production of knowledge. In a similar vein, Schendel argues that people who produce knowledge of these spaces cannot become part of the power elite: 'In true mandala fashion, these marches are sometimes claimed as part of some regional problematique, but always from the vantage point of the court. These borderlands are rarely worth a real fight—they are often forgotten' (Schendel 2002b: 650–1).

In postcolonial India, distinctions between 'nationals' and 'sub-nationals' or 'local' and 'national' highlight social and political movements relating to identity and homeland. Arguing for locating the 'local' and the 'national' as different categories, Saikia notes:

[I] use the term local to distinguish the identity movements from the national movements to homogenize Indian identity. The national movement, as is generally understood, is linked to capital, the West, and, at present, to the discourse on globalization. Local movements, on the other hand, attempt to override the power of the national. They seek to create a 'different' sense of collectivity based on specific constructs that are emotional, sentimental discourses that give meaning to locality and enable the construction of a 'homeland' as a different space from the homelands of 'others' (Saikia 2004: 38).

Emphasizing the transition of the North East Frontier Province to the 'Northeast region' of India in the postcolonial period, Baruah argues that the region is not only an important cartographic reality in Indian politics but also a space where physical power plays a dominant role in constructing a political discourse of citizenship and people-hood (Baruah 1999: 144–72, 2005a: 183–208). Representations of frontiers and their peoples in postcolonial national imaginations are enforced by a new dominant political discourse—through the lenses of an authoritarian and national objectivity. As Haraway explains, representations and imaginations of the *Other* originate from · ·iated knowledge, defining situated knowledge as an embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical doctrines. Much like Baruah and Said, she critiques the world of *objectivity* as a historical and political process honed and produced by a dominant hegemonic discourse (Haraway 1991: 185–90). Where can one locate the Nagas within such existing geographies of representation, institutions, and imaginations?

SITUATING THE PEOPLE

Colonial categorization of Naga people continues to find its way into modern national imaginations in postcolonial India. The Nagas were one of the most widely studied ethnic communities in the north-eastern frontiers of British India in the early twentieth century. They were frequently depicted as a community whose lives were threatened due to contact with dominant cultures, modernity, and developmental policies. However, they attracted a different kind of attention by the middle of the twentieth century. After the transfer of power in 1947, the Nagas along with several frontier groups refused to join India and launched a resistance movement, continuing a broad South Asian tradition of anti-colonial retaliations against the British in the nineteenth century. Such conflicts between the 'natives' and a new postcolonial state resulted in a continuance of the colonial projects: sequestering, pacifying, and subjugating the Nagas. The colonial state saw the Nagas as subjects, and the Indian state was unwilling to see them differently, as its national leaders were engaged in the process of nation building through citizenship and territorializing India's inherited frontiers. With their demands for a sovereign nation, the Nagas therefore appeared as reluctant citizens who were not attuned with the 'great modern desire' to forge a new postcolonial Indian nation.

Pacifying the 'naked Nagas' has, therefore, remained a problematic proposal.[4] The Nagas seem to be an embarrassing reminder to India of just how much went wrong with the grand project of decolonization.[5] Colonial ethnographic writing shaped a particular postcolonial political imagination and therefore an understanding about the Nagas. These writings associated the 'naked' Naga with everything that was uncivilized, barbaric, and primitive, although they also contained extensive sections referring to the Naga people as noble savages and simple warm people. Such discourse of the *Other* became the guiding principles for both colonial and postcolonial policy makers who formulated the developmental, security, and educational policies for the Nagas.

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[4] Colonial writings described the Naga people as 'naked Nagas' and 'head hunters'. Such representations and writings often found their way in postcolonial publications in India.

[5] Fürer-Haimendorf was an Austrian anthropologist who extensively documented the lives of the Nagas in the early twentieth century.

Just as colonial power emerged from constructing and deducing knowledge and forms of authority, postcolonial nations altered and developed the discourse on existing knowledge stores. With the end of colonialism, memory, constructed identities, and the existing imbalance of power and social structure within colonized natives never vanished. Postcolonialism continues to reproduce collective meanings around groups, places, and representations. Such meanings are framed in constitutional and policy regulations, which result in the construction of citizenship discourses, security issues, and the task of monitoring these institutions. Such a linear knowledge structure from colonialism to postcolonialism exists in modern institutions such as the judiciary and police forces in order to enable them to negotiate 'ambiguous constructions' and 'restless categories' (McClintock 1995: 5–11). For instance, colonial laws and regulations established to control and regulate colonial plantation economy and the exploitation of oil along the Brahmaputra Valley continue to operate in these inherited frontiers.

The colonial process of mapping uncharted space as British territory is explained in a colonial official letter from the British headquarters in Calcutta:

[T]he Lieutenant Governor thinks that a line between civil and political jurisdictions must be drawn in regard to these Nagas, and begs that you will be good…to submit a map showing this part of the Luckimpoor frontier, the situation of all the tea gardens upon it, and the line of jurisdiction you would draw. You should also say in any and what Naga property or privileges is included in what is proposed for our jurisdiction (13 March 1873).[6]

Such practices not only led to the creation of artificial internal borders, but also enabled the colonial administration to further frame its policies along identity and ethno-racial lines. Existing border disputes, changes in land relations, and the politics of land ownership in former colonized areas around the world are not uncommon. One would argue that such disputes are not regional or area specific. On the contrary, the disputes are consequences of British colonial frontier politics of enacting legislation enforcing regulations and the emergence of tools for defining and categorizing communities and peoples as criminals,

[6]   Foreign Department, Political A. 'From Junior Secretary to the Government of Assam: To Commissioner of Assam dated No. 1317 Calcutta, 3 April 1873', Nos 205–11, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

primitives, and savages, thereby establishing the dominance of the colonial administration as the sovereign authority over these territories. Thus, one could argue, representations of primitives, savages and the existing national imagination in postcolonial societies are the *artefacts* of a colonial historical process.

REVISITING THE NAGA ARCHIVES

Researchers have relied heavily on colonial texts in their analysis of Naga society and politics. Military accounts of British expeditions into the Naga areas in the eighteenth century, monographs of 'barbaric naked' Nagas, and administrative reports from the Naga Hills continue to be privileged documents in examining the Naga people's past (Bower 2002: 1–21; Elwin 1969: 11–46; Hutton 2002: 1–71; Mills 2003: 1–20; Fürer-Haimendorf 2004: 149–55). However, most colonial texts are notorious for their inability to negotiate linguistic and internal socio-political complexities and, thus, ought to be cautiously used to support or refute historical claims (Robinson 1959: 26–8; Thapar 2005:1–6; Woodthorpe 1959: 42–50).

Colonial writers in the Naga Hills often resorted to Western symbols or objects to describe and interpret several Naga customs and rituals. These ethnographies are strong reminders that their research material was designed for a Western audience. For instance, Hutton described the Angami Naga's funeral ritual (of putting up a black and white cloth) as an image that resembles a sail. He commented, 'When any proper man dies, they told me that they put them (the cloths) up so that the dead man might see them, but I could not get any more [information] from them.' Similarly, Woodthorpe noted how the same ritual appeared to him as a large silver chevron turned upside down. Hutton also described how the mithun's (bison) horns adorning the heads of the warriors carved on the gates of houses and villages resembled the wings of a medieval jester's cap. He also compared 'Negros' and Nagas whenever he came across curly haired Nagas (Hutton 1986: 16–23).

Studying the Mru in neighbouring Bangladesh, Schendel says, '…in the mid-nineteenth century, nakedness had been a symbol of wildness…. [but] what the "unclothed native" meanwhile thought of all this remains unrecorded…' (Schendel 2002a: 349). In J.H. Hutton's diary, a British administrator described an encounter between the colonialists and the Nagas during one of his expeditions in the Naga Hills:

To Ukha, a steep climb of about five to six miles after crossing the river. The people here were very shy. They were...obviously afraid of our intentions, no doubt on account of what happened last time, when they tried to ambush Woodthorpe's escort, and succeeded in wounding a sepoy and getting their village burnt...when I turned my camera on a crowded *morung*[7] all the occupants fled, taking it for some sort of deadly weapon, and could not be induced to return. Yet they cannot even have seen or heard of a machine gun. If one looked at them they got up and went away... (Hutton 1986: 18).

For Hutton, such experiences in the wild frontiers of the colonial empire were amusing anecdotes. However, his passing comment about the confusion of mistaking the camera for a gun conceals a deeper story about fierce battles and conflicts between inhabitants and invaders. The consequence for killing a sepoy was severe. Thus, it was a manifestation of received knowledge among the Nagas that modern disciplinarian traditions were to be part of their relationship with the Europeans. This also meant that the Nagas would be viewed within the modernist framework, where their nakedness could also add to their democratic tradition. Thus, a dual policy prevailed wherein the 'savage' could be contained within an area that could be administered tactfully, and the 'primitive' could be protected from the pitfalls of his/her own simplicity. In the meantime, Christian missionaries introduced the Bible and hymns along with mission schools. This led to the introduction of the Roman alphabet which transcribed the Naga spoken words and led to the translation of the Bible and hymnals into various Naga languages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kikon 2003: 235).

Similarly, there were changes among the Nagas who were employed in the colonial administration and those influenced by the missionaries. By the early twentieth century, the Nagas dressed in clothes representing their influences. For instance, those influenced by the Baptist mission wore shorts, khaki shirts, and caps on their tours with the missionaries. Those employed by the administration as the colonial interpreters usually wore red waistcoats to signify their official position (see Photograph 4.1). In the same manner, carrying a red blanket was introduced among the village headmen, which gradually became a protocol for all official meetings.

[7] A youth dormitory in Naga villages, usually a centre for social, cultural, and political activities.

Photograph 4.1: Village headmen and *dobashi*s (interpreters) in a meeting
Source: Abraham Lotha, 2005

Fürer-Haimendorf has a colourful description of an Angami Naga interpreter named Thevoni, who wore a bright red waistcoat over his black loincloth. Thevoni is presented as a friendly person eager to share the customs and beliefs of his tribe with the colonialists. His help to the government in mediating village disputes is seen as an important skill. For Fürer-Haimendorf, people like Thevoni were valued by the colonial administration because they were influential among the villages without jeopardizing the social order and customs (Fürer-Haimendorf 2004). Once the clothing and civilization project took off, the Nagas commenced their roles as pastors, teachers, missionaries, and government employees. While very little has been documented from the eyes of the natives, interviews with a Naga volunteer during World War II highlight some of the experiences of Nagas during this period of time.

FAMILY PORTRAIT AND TRANSITION INTO POSTCOLONIALISM

Mr Luke (Photograph 4.2, standing extreme right) was born in Guwahati, Assam, where his father served the American Baptist missionaries. After receiving a mission school education, he went back to the Naga Hills and joined the colonial administration. He served as a medical assistant during World War II, when he and his

Photograph 4.2: Family portrait
Source: Personal archives, circa 1952

young wife (standing, extreme left) helped to set up medical camps for the allied troops. Sharing her experiences of the war, his wife Oreno Kikon says:

I worked along with my husband during the war. There were so many wounded soldiers in the camps. The soldiers were friendly and would share their food with us in the medical camps. I tasted some of the food, but it was particularly exciting to see the parachutes. They were so colourful and interesting. The parachute was made of some very fine soft, silky material. I loved the materials so I requested the soldiers to give it to me. After I finished helping out my husband in the medical camps, I would come back home and cut these fine clothes. I stitched bed covers, some clothes for my children and table covers. I also embroidered flowers on several scarves I had stitched from the parachute material. Once the war was over in the hills, I stood outside the camps and presented a scarf to the soldiers as they waved at us and left the hills singing ...*Kohima will shine tonight, Kohima will shine tonight...*[a]

Like many nations and communities around the world, Naga society underwent significant changes in the course of the two world wars. The

[a] Personal interview with Oreno Kikon, age ninety-three, on 1 January 2003 in Wokha, Nagaland.

Nagas were members of the labour corps digging trenches in France during World War I, and fought with the Allied soldiers in World War II along the north-eastern frontiers of India. In the meantime, institutions like the Naga Club, a post–World War I discussion forum, brought together educated Nagas to discuss their future. The Naga Club members were English-educated Naga men in suits. While its initiatives were limited to the administration in the Naga Hills, the club gradually became associated with discussions and debates about the transfer of power in mainland India. Factors such as the Indian national movement and the Simon Commission, a colonial mission that surveyed the Naga Hills collecting feedback on the people's demand for sovereignty, significantly shaped discussions along political and social issues of autonomy, resource management, and administration via indigenous institutions.

Utilizing the logic that India would be granted independence from British rule, the Nagas also demanded that they should be 'left alone' after 1947. By 1951, the Nagas called for a plebiscite around two issues: whether they wanted to remain in India or to establish a separate, independent state; and second, to repudiate the Indian government's view that the call for sovereignty was the work of a few 'misguided' Nagas. The following year, in 1952, the Nagas boycotted the first Indian parliamentary election and continued to demand a Naga sovereign homeland.

Inclusion of and participation in democratic processes are considered to be hallmarks of post-colonial state building in India. However, in postcolonial India, the Nagas, along with several frontier groups, did not figure prominently in the memory and imagery of the new nation. They had to be written in as constituents. What was the manner in which postcolonial India constructed the Nagas within the national imagination? What was the basis of the dialogue or interaction between a hegemonic nation and its reluctant citizens?

WHOSE MEMORY? MUSEUMS AND THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION

James Clifford challenges and questions the status and role of museums as storehouses of memory and culture when he states, 'Whose memory? For what purpose?' (Clifford 1988: 248). National museums are one of the most visible institutions in postcolonial India, signifying the colonial project of representation and producing objectivist knowledge. Museums are hegemonic narratives of national culture and civilization. For instance, the National Museum in Calcutta is one example of an

institution representing the *Other*. One begins the negotiation on identity, citizenship, and verification at the ticket counter. As a Naga stands in the queue meant for Indians, there is a request to switch over to the foreigners' line. After speaking in Hindi, a brief lecture on history, geography, and the Naga people, the Naga/Indian is allowed to enter. Inside the grand colonial building, almost every modern state that comprises the Indian union is accorded space to display their contribution to the grandeur of India's great and ancient civilization.

In a musty room, people from the Northeast regions are displayed together, where people of every state are allotted a glass cage resembling a prison cell.[9] Clay and terracotta couples with children smile at all the visitors from carelessly reconstructed villages that they presumably inhabit in their respective homelands. All the models, slightly yellowish in colour, look alike with the epicanthic fold of the eyes but are juxtaposed in a manner that would be typical of a child dressing a doll in a dollhouse. Hence, the Naga couple in the glass cage are adorned in Karbi fabric and prints; the Khasi couple are dressed in the typical attire of the Assamese peasant, and so on. It could well be that the museum is promoting a hybrid Northeast, where, ideally, Nagas, Assamese, Garos, and Apatanis, all wear one another's clothes. But given the immediate memory of being mistaken for a foreigner just outside the precincts of the museum, one is sceptical about the museum's altruistic ersatz of wishing for a politically correct world. Museums, it has been said, often project the memory of a nation.

Symbolically clothed, the Naga couple continues to educate visitors in the National Museum about Indian history at its margins. However, such representations raise serious questions about a national imagination. For instance, the term *chinky*, a derogatory word used in India to refer to people with the epicanthic fold of the eyes, does not identify one's nationality or ethnicity, although it is generally used to refer to people who could be from a wide swathe of land that roughly cuts across the eastern Himalayas, where the Naga territories are situated. Racial stereotyping is so ingrained into the public memory that sexual harassment on the streets of New Delhi, the capital of India, goes something like this: 'Hello chinky baby, honey...*smooch smooch*

[makes kissing sounds]...hot baby, honey, pinky, chinky, ping-pong, ching-chong.'[10] Besides disgusting sounds and derogatory remarks, the perpetrator tries to rhyme it with nonsensical words like ping-pong and ching-chong. Crowds of awkward teenagers seeking out some fun in the streets often shout, 'hey chinky' every time they see people with east Asian features. Such 'innocent fun' that Hindi/Punjabi speaking teenagers in New Delhi engage in reflects a normalization of a visual regime where people like Nagas do not have a secure place within the nation-state.

One would agree that regional stereotyping in India is not uncommon. For instance, people from south India are all supposedly Madrasis[11] or those from the north are all Punjabis. Likewise, inhabitants from the seven states of Northeast India are assumed to be one people. However, for Nagas and several other groups from the region, such stereotyping is linked to a violent historical and unstable political relation with the postcolonial nation. Decades of counter-insurgency operations, anti-democratic laws, and existing armed resistance in several parts of the northeastern region immediately draws a typical instance of regional stereotyping into a matrix of dangerous securitization based on race, culture, and location. Therefore, the transition of colonial representations of 'savages' and 'primitives' has only become more violent and regulatory in postcolonial India. State regulations and security agencies such as police forces are sanctioned to monitor the 'savages' at the margins of the nation. Here, the Constitution of India stands in sharp contradiction with its democratic principles. Even though the Nagas are seen through the lens of citizenship, they are imbued with a collective memory reserved for the other and further located within a specific geographical territory and history.

It is under such conditions that anti-democratic regulations like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958) operate. This legislation

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[9] The room is referred to as 'Peoples of Northeast India'. This obviously underscores the diversity within the strange administrative region called Northeast India, wherein the region is gridlocked into a political project of nation building where memory and history are deemed dispensable.

[10] Loosely reconstructed from personal experiences of seven years of living in Delhi (1994–2000).

[11] Southern India has five languages recognized by the Indian constitution. They are Telugu, Tamil, Konkani, Malayali, and Kannada. However, in the national imagination shaped by colonial markers of identity, anyone south of the Vindhya hills is erroneously classified as a 'Madrasi' (a person from Madras; the capital of Tamil Nadu, now called Chennai). According to A.S. Panneerselvam, this is the outcome of several Tamil Brahmins being part of the Indian bureaucracy and power network and also the attempt to domesticate Dravidian politics (Personal communication: 16 August 2007).

imposed in Naga areas (along with several other states in the Northeast) grants the Indian security forces unrestricted powers to conduct military operations including the power to kill on mere suspicion of a violation in order to maintain law and order. Thus, by virtue of the geographical, historical, and political constructions among other issues, the Nagas and several other nationalities from the region are denied access to rights and justice. Considered as perennial troublemakers, the representation of Naga people continues to sway between the naked headhunter and the gun-wielding guerrillas (Photograph 4.3). The image of barbarism remains intact because both representations are mechanically reinforced by uncivilized, violent, and primitive attributes.

Writings in postcolonial India, according to Ranabir Samaddar, represent the frontier and marginalized peoples as headhunters and a land of drug caravans, AIDS, civic strife, military operations, and insurgencies (Samaddar 2001: 286). So strong is this racial/
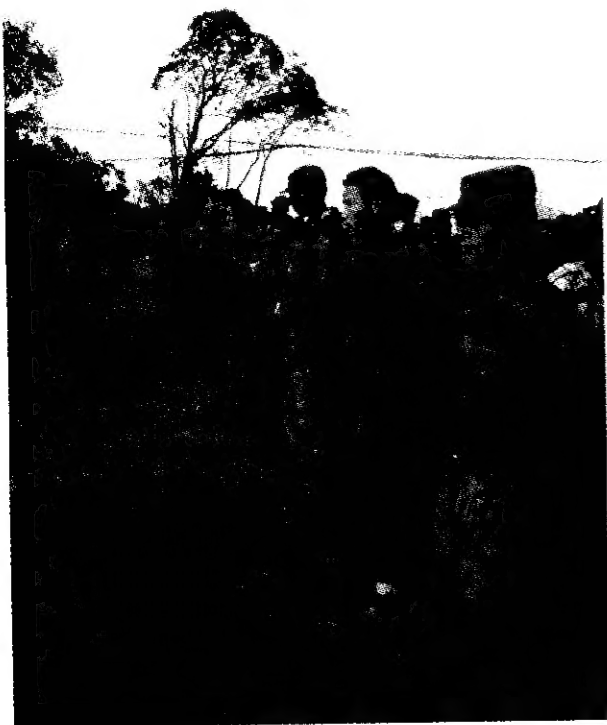
Photograph 4.3: Naga guerrillas
Source: Akum Longchari, 2005

anthropological regime that the first Indian air force pilots whose plane was brought down by the Naga resistance in the 1960s, were terrified by the possibility of being captured by the headhunting Nagas who they knew were waiting below. As they parachuted down to a fate worse than anything that a 'civilized Indian' security personnel could imagine, they were surrounded by Naga guerrillas the moment they touched ground. The first words uttered by the officer of the Naga resistance army were: 'Your identification numbers, badge and squadron please…you are our prisoners of war.'[12] They cited the Geneva Convention to their prisoners. Those meant to headhunt in loinclothes, had emerged as guerrillas in olive green uniforms by the mid-twentieth century and were armed with international conventions and rights instruments.

PROTESTS AND REFASHIONING NAGA REPRESENTATIONS

Written literature and especially photo documentations of the Nagas still continue to present topless women, naked children, and men in loincloths. There is a disturbing discrepancy between existing representations and lived realities of the people. Such documentation and representation are blind to the radical changes that Naga society has undergone in approximately hundred years, and do not explain the deeper significance. Nagas are no longer naked, but they continue to shed their clothes as symbols of culture and resistance (Photograph 4.4). In many demonstrations and public gatherings, one notices an increasing number of men dressed up as warriors with spears, and women with their sarongs wrapped around their chests. Once a sign of barbarism, these bare bodies have become political tools of protest.

Naga memory and postcolonial imagination reflect contradictory conceptions. Such resistance of the local against the national manifests itself in the realm of representations and images. Symbols and representations have become sites of information where the audience absorbs these meanings selectively. Thus, a journalist for an Indian magazine reporting a state-sponsored cultural event highlighted: 'Naga people by nature are fun lovers, and life in Nagaland is one long festival' (Chaudhuri 2003: 1). Representations of ethnic minorities as fun-loving simpletons are also bolstered through national television and media. They are often featured as sharing their 'way of life'

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[12] I am grateful to Subir Bhaumik of the BBC for recounting this story. One of the pilots happened to be related to Bhaumik (Personal notes, 7 September 2005, Guwahati).
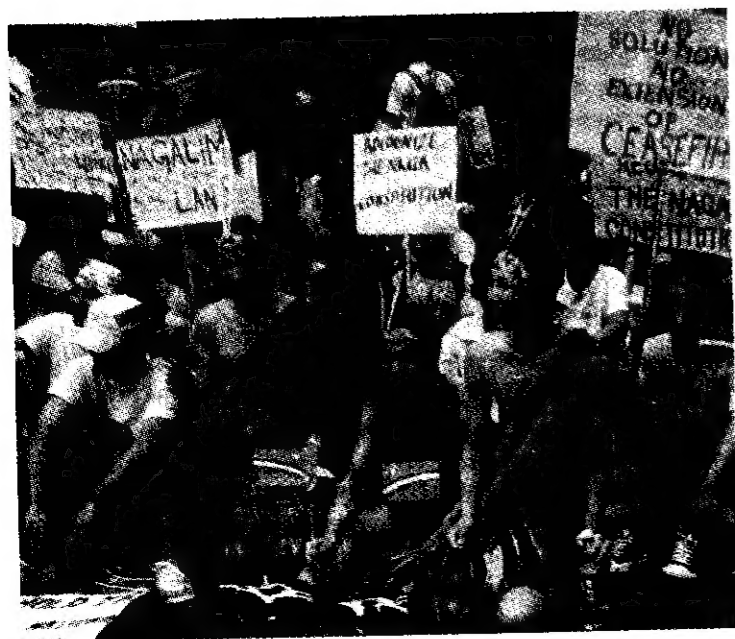
Photograph 4.4: Naga students in a demonstration, New Delhi
Source: Associated Press, 2008

through dances and songs, which supposedly represent their 'world'. Postcolonial imaginations and representations in India lack the political and historical lens to comprehend how communities like the Nagas have negotiated and engaged with reality. Narrating the political and civil upheavals that Nagas experienced, eighty-five-year-old Matalo Kikon, from Tsungiki village said:

[D]uring 1956–63, villages were burnt down several times. There was constant army operation and the entire village ran away to the jungle. The women and children were the worst sufferers. There was food scarcity since all our granaries were burnt down and we could not go back to the fields to cultivate our farms. Many children died in the jungles because of starvation. The womenfolk from the village started to live in the caves beneath the mountains and in their sorrow and pain cried out if god had forgotten their existence.[13]

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[13] The interviewee was a resident of Tsungiki village, Nagaland, on 14 December 2003. This interview was part of a series titled, 'Narratives from a Militarized Society: Experiences Naga Women in Armed Conflict Situation', WISCOMP, New Delhi, 2004.

The stark difference between dancing cultural subjects of postcolonial India as seen on national television and the reality that inhabitants like Matalo Kikon narrate from the Northeast highlights how discourse on culture in India exists within a contentious political history of resistance and violence. Therefore, for many Nagas, bare bodies are sites of culture and resistance. Moreover, in Naga–Indian meetings, besides the political demand for the right to self-determination, the emphasis on culture is significant. From the beginning, the Naga people's demand for a homeland derived from 'being different'. Issues such as culture are contentious subjects which often create a chasm between India and the Naga people during political attempts to resolve the armed conflict. For the Nagas, memories of colonization and postcolonial experiences encompass vivid mental imageries of authoritarian representation, massacres, and destruction. Echoing Belting who points out that 'images contain moments from a narrative....' (1994: 10), Easterine Iralu, a Naga poet weaving mental imageries in her poem 'Kelhoukevira' writes:

Their hearts too grieved to heed the harvest
Maidens ceased song and mourned the brave ones
And blindly followed a broken people
Who turned their backs
And slowly walked away
From a burning village, a burning village
...They trampled her silent hills
And squeezed life out of her
And washed their guilt in her blood,
Washed their guilt in her blood[14]

The Nagas have developed their sense of political and social representation by retrieving and constructing their past. Thus, the representation of their bare bodies in protest demonstrations is in defiance of disciplinary regimes and a provocation to a larger national imagination. As the Nagas and the government compete to define culture, the idea of culture to the state is reduced to the circulation of cultural products through commercial exchanges, thereby living up to the notion of the state as the capitalist exploiter (Kikon 2005: 36–9). However, the peripheral zones of the nation are seldom ascribed a

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[14] Easterine Iralu is a Naga scholar and a poet. 'Kelhoukevira' is part of a translated piece among other poems by her (Iralu. Kaka. D, 'Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears', 2000, Kohima, Nagaland).

neutral space. As Ferguson and Gupta emphasize, 'The fiction of cultures as discrete, object-like phenomena occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those who inhabit the borderlands' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7). In 2002, the Government of Nagaland inaugurated the Horn Bill festival as an annual event to boost tourism in the state. While this event has since become an annual event to showcase Naga culture and their way of life, the realities and changes are reflected through the bare back of a Naga youth with the name of an American rock band—Metallica—tattooed on his back (see Photograph 4.5), greeting tourists and audiences in the festival.

For such Naga youth, an annual event such as the Horn Bill festival has become part of a narrative of stories that echo the experiences of their ancestors, guerrillas, and politicians. For an outside audience, Naga savagery and nakedness are reinforced through the display of bare bodies. Yet, the other narrative that alludes to the complex ways in which Naga tradition, culture, and politics are enmeshed with

Photograph 4.5: A participant at the Horn Bill festival
Source: Personal archives, 2003

Photograph 4.6: Billboards advertising the milk product 'Komul' and
an Indian Army recruitment campaign
Source: Personal archives, 2005

their historical encounter with modern institutions and modernizing processes, is somehow subsumed within a reductionist narrative. The existing world that Nagas inhabit are represented through billboards outside the Dimapur train station in Nagaland, India: while one billboard represents a Naga girl advertising milk products as health food in front of superimposed Swiss landscapes, the second billboard displays a Naga boy in battle gear beckoning other Naga youths to join the Indian army and render service to the nation (see Photograph 4.6). Therefore, it is within contested political, cultural, and historical spaces that the representations, imagination, and negotiations between the Nagas and the Indian state operate, and not in staged amphitheatres of the Horn Bill festival or within discrete national televised cultural spaces.

CONCLUSION

Literature relating to armed conflicts and anthropological texts continue to remain prescribed material for an understanding of Naga history and culture in the postcolonial period in India. Simultaneously, underlying descriptions of Naga histories enable discourses of development and

progress. Describing the reinvention of the primitivity and nakedness of the Mru people of the Chittagong Hills Tracts after 1947, Schendel points out, 'Primitivity reappeared in …popular literature as a concept to explain the hill people's way of life…nakedness…a century later has become a symbol of underdevelopment' (Schendel 2002a: 348–9).

This essay highlights images of the Nagas, which continue to hold sway in policy-making circles. It emphasizes the need to disaggregate matters beyond simple objectified depictions—representations and imaginations of the 'Naked Nagas'. Images and imaginations of insurgents and missionaries all respectively need to be situated within a context of change and competing constructions, acquiescence, and resistance to historical processes. It also underlines the importance of national imagery in the political representation of groups like the Nagas. Constructed national representations, much like the 'Northeast' sections inside national museums in postcolonial India, are used by counter-insurgency political discourse to dehumanize the *Other*. It is only through an exercise of deconstruction for contextualization that one can engage with the existing political and historical contestations and ambiguities in the postcolonial imagination in India.

CHAPTER 5

Writing Terror
Men of Rebellion and Contemporary Assamese Literature

RAKHEE KALITA[1]

In an essay called 'The Discreet Charms of Indian Terrorism', cultural critic Ashis Nandy looks at the dramatic hijacking of an Indian aircraft by Sikh militants in July 1984 (Nandy 2004a). The incident occurred in the wake of the massive army campaign Operation Bluestar in Punjab.[2] A Delhi-bound plane from Srinagar was hijacked and redirected to Lahore, Pakistan, in a bid to put pressure on the Indian government to release hundreds of Sikhs arrested during the army action at the Golden Temple. Nandy's account of what unfolds inside the aircraft is not a spine-chilling tale of mad violence and gory terror, but a heart-warming account of traditional Indian hospitality and sentimental concern for the well-being of their victims by a group of 'friendly' gun-toting young men. Nandy's essay is a warning against assuming that the phenomenon of terrorism is the same everywhere, lacking in local nuances and specificities—the kind of understanding that has become especially popular since 9/11.[3]

[2] Operation Bluestar conducted in June 1984 was one of the largest counter-terrorist army operations in India in which several Sikh militants were taken into army custody at the Harmandir Sahib Temple in Punjab.

[3] Terror, I should think, is not merely the bomb exploding, or the several unsuspecting dying or dead, or even the awareness of who the 'enemy' is. Terror is the sense of being swamped, as it were, by a systemic derangement in which social structures are steeped. It is, perhaps, more significantly, our doubts about who or what is responsible for it. I stress this because there is, in the wake of 9/11, a huge